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INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 8535  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ DEC LIMA 4597  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 9841  
RUEHQ/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5255  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 011382

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER MARR CO

SUBJECT: COLMIL CASUALTIES: COMBAT, MINES, AND DISEASE

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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¶11. (C) In 2005, 1,058 COLMIL personnel died from combat and other causes (death rate of 0.4 percent). Of this total, 541 were killed in combat or by mines, almost all by the FARC, and 517 died in accidents or other causes. Over 1,700 were wounded (0.7 percent). Land mines are a growing hazard, accounting for 40 percent of combat deaths and 55 percent of combat injuries. Leishmaniasis disease also plagues forces in jungle zones, afflicting 7,600 soldiers this year (4 percent of the COLAR) for 2-3 month periods. End Summary.

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DEATHS: Rates Declining  
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¶12. (C) According to the COLMIL's Division of Occupational Health, 1,058 members of Colombia's roughly 252,000 armed forces (Army, Navy, and Air Force) died in 2005, about 0.4 percent, or one in every 250 personnel. Terrorist engagements mostly with the FARC, were responsible for 541 of the deaths. Land mines caused about 40 percent of combat deaths. Over the past ten years the overall death rate has fluctuated between 0.6 percent (1998) and 0.4 percent (2004). Rates usually run higher in the first half of each year; at mid-2006 the toll was 648 deaths (0.26 percent).

¶13. (C) Non-combat deaths are now on a par with combat deaths. They are largely due to accidents (about 45 percent), homicide (30 percent), suicide (15 percent), and natural causes (10 percent). The relative growth in combat deaths reflects increased operations as offensive units enter FARC strongholds where the FARC defends its coca fields with snipers, ambushes, and mine fields.

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INJURIES: Accidents Waning  
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¶14. (C) 1,765 members (0.7 percent) of the armed forces were wounded in 2005, one in every 140 persons. This injury rate is below the ten-year average of 0.9 percent, and only half of its peak of 1.5 percent in 1998. Non-combat injuries, mainly caused by accidents, have declined sharply from a peak of one in every 100 members in 1998 to one in 335 in 2005, due to better training. Injuries were once mainly outside

combat (67 percent in the late 1990s), but combat is now the major cause (around 55 percent since 2002).

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LAND MINES: Higher Toll  
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**¶15. (C)** Mines and explosives killed 213 service members and wounded 548 in 2005, about 55 percent of combat injuries. Those numbers are on the rise in 2006, reaching 123 killed and 370 wounded at mid-year. The FARC plants mines for tactical defense, as a protective belt around coca fields, and for confinement and control of rural populations. The COLMIL is increasingly exposed to this weapon as it penetrates guerrilla territory. Departments with highest casualties from mines in 2003-6 are Antioquia (20 percent of all casualties), Meta (15 percent), Caqueta (13 percent), N. Santander (9 percent), Tolima (8 percent), Arauca (7 percent), Cauca (7 percent), and Putumayo (5 percent). These are front line areas where COLAR deploys its professional soldiers. Even when not fatal, mine injuries often involve losses of limbs, incapacitating victims from further military action.

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ILLNESS: Leishmaniasis Scourge  
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**¶16. (C)** A disease endemic to Colombia's jungles is cutaneous leishmaniasis, borne by sand flies whose bites create skin sores and infect organs. The disease is fatal if untreated. Treatment involves 2-3 months of drug therapy and bed care, and a person can contract the illness multiple times. As of mid-November 2006, the COLAR alone has logged more than 7,600 cases, equivalent to one in every 27 soldiers. If each soldier is out of duty for three months, then on average one percent of the COLAR is incapacitated by the disease at any given time.

**¶17. (C)** Leishmaniasis is most prevalent in the jungle departments of Meta (30 percent of 2006 cases), Caqueta (24 percent), and Guaviare (11 percent). These areas comprise the COLMIL's main effort in the fight against the FARC, meaning the disease afflicts its most seasoned and elite offensive forces. It takes a heavier toll on the FARC, however, who live full-time in jungle camps, and whose medicine supply lines are long (cross-border) and can be disrupted by COLMIL action.

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COLAR Bears Brunt  
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**¶18. (C)** Military deaths are almost all within the Army (90 percent), which is the largest branch (83 percent of total forces) and has the highest combat mortality rate. In 2005, per 10,000 COLAR troops, 45 died from all causes, 74 were injured from all causes, and 368 had leishmaniasis (using '06 data as a proxy). In sum, 487 persons, or nearly 5 percent, were disabled from action, either temporarily or permanently.

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Table 1: Death Rates, 2000-2006 (percent of personnel)  
Colombian Armed Forces -- COLAR, COLNAV, COLAF

	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06*
Combat KIAs	.17	.17	.18	.16	.12	.13	.08
Mines / IEDs	.01	.02	.08	.07	.06	.08	.05
-> Combat total	.18	.18	.26	.23	.19	.22	.13
Accidents	.09	.10	.12	.10	.09	.10	.05
Homicide	.08	.10	.08	.09	.06	.04	.03
Suicide	.04	.04	.04	.05	.04	.04	.02

Natural causes	.02	.02	.02	.03	.03	.03	.02
-> Non-combat	.23	.26	.25	.27	.21	.20	.13
==> Total deaths	.41	.44	.51	.50	.40	.42	.26

\* 1/1 - 7/13/06

(Note: sums are correct; discrepancies due to rounding.)

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**Table 2: Injury Rates, 2000-2006 (percent of personnel)**  
**Colombian Armed Forces -- COLAR, COLNAV, COLAF**

	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06*
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Mines/explosives	.07	.07	.21	.24	.18	.22	.15
Wounded in action	.26	.27	.31	.27	.22	.18	.11
-> Combat injuries	.33	.34	.52	.51	.40	.40	.26
Accident/ firearm	.13	.11	.13	.15	.08	.09	.04
Accident/ transit	.13	.14	.17	.15	.08	.07	.04
Accident/ work	.17	.13	.06	.09	.08	.07	.01
Att. hom/suicide	.06	.04	.02	.04	.03	.04	.03
Other causes	.10	.07	.06	.07	.05	.05	.03
-> Non-combat	.60	.48	.44	.51	.32	.30	.16
==>Total injuries	.93	.82	.96	1.01	.72	.70	.42

\* 1/1 - 7/13/06

(Note: sums are correct; discrepancies due to rounding.)

WOOD